Information on the Lands of Brasil, Sent Through Father Nobrega*

The information on these parts of Brasil which I am able to give you, dear fathers and brothers, is that this land has more than a thousand miles of coastline, the whole of which is inhabited by people who, women as well as men, go about naked, excepting in some very distant regions wherein the women dress in the manner of gypsies, in cotton dresses; that land must be colder than (the one which I describe), for this is very temperate, in such a way that the winter is neither cold nor hot, and the summer, even though it may be warmer, causes no one to suffer; it is, however, a very humid land, on account of the many moderate showers that continually fall, and which serve to keep the trees and shrubs constantly green. And for this reason the land is very fresh. In parts it is very rough, on account of mountains and forests, the latter always green.

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* Parentheses -()- are used in this translation in place of brackets -[]-.

17: Nobrega--91 [2] (1550) 1844 Tupinamba
116, 137

There are, in these (forests), [AW: of Brazil] diverse fruits which the people of the land eat, even though they are not always as good as they might be if they were planted; because I see that they yield grapes, even (as much as) twice a year; however, this is infrequent, on account of ants, which do much damage, not only in this instance, but in other cases besides. Citrons, oranges, lemons, are all produced in great quantities, and very excellent figs, like those of (Portugal).

17: Nobrega--91 [3.] (1550) 1844 Tupinamba
116, 262

The common staple of the land is a root, which they call mandioca, from which they make a farinha that everyone eats, and which also yields a wine that, when mixed with the farinha, makes a bread resembling that (which we make) from wheat. Fish are plentiful, as are molluscs, on which the people live, and there is a great deal of game in the forest, (as well as) ducks which the Indians fatten; oxen, cows, sheep, goats, and chickens are also present in the land in great quantity.

17: Nobrega--91-92 (1550) 1844 Tupinamba
116, 101, 177

The people [AW: of Brazil] are of diverse groups, some called Goyanazes, others Carijós. The latter are a better people than any other on the coast. They were visited, not many years ago, by two Spanish friars, who came to teach them, and they took to the doctrine very well, so that now they have retreats for women, like (those of our) nuns, and others for men, like (those for) friars. And this state of things lasted a long time, until the devil brought to that territory a group of naked enemies (who assaulted them), so that many of them were captured. We (now) work to relocate the captives, and some we have already returned to their homeland, together with [92] one of our fathers. There is another group of people called Gaimares; they are the people living in the forests, having no communication with the Christians, and who become terrified at the sight of us, and they say that we are their brothers, since we wear beards like they do, unlike any of the other groups, who even pull out their eyelashes, and who make holes in their lips and their nostrils, and put bones in them, so that they appear demoniacal. And thus some people, mainly the magicians, tattoo the whole of the face. These people are so big that they can draw a very strong bow with one hand, (holding) in the other a big piece of wood, with which they fight against their adversaries, and easily despatch them, fleeing through the woods, and they are much more timid than any of the others.

17: Nobrega--92
116, 101, 362

(1550) 1844

Tupinamba

Those who have been in contact with us up to now are of two groups, one called the Tupimaquiis, and the other the Tupinambas. These have palm houses of large size, and some of them contain as many as fifty Indians with their wives and offspring.

17: Nobrega--92 [2] (1550) 1844 Tupinamba
116, 513

They sleep in cotton nets [GSV: hammocks] near the fire, to which they have access all during the night, on account of their nakedness (offering no protection from) the cold; (they) are just like the demons that they say flee to the fire.

17: Nobrega--92 [3] (1550) 1844 Tupinamba
116, 373

No matter where they go at night, they always carry firebrands.

17: Nobrega--92 [4] (1550) 1844 Tupinamba
116, 776

These people worship nothing, nor do they know of God; only the thunder do they call tupane, which in their language means something divine. And so, in trying to make them understand God, we have no better word than pai tupane [GSV: "the father of thunder"].

Only among them do there occur ceremonies after the following manner: in certain years magicians come from far distant lands, who pretend to be holy. When they arrive the paths are cleaned and they are received with feasts and dances according to custom. Before they arrive, the women, in groups of twos, go into the houses and confess their faults against their husbands to each other and ask forgiveness for them. When he arrives with great ceremony in the village, the magician enters a dark house and puts in it a calabash resemblong a human figure, in the most convenient place for his delusions. Changing his voice into that of a child near the head [AM: of the calabash], he tells them not to work, not to go to the fields, that the crops will grow by themselves, that they will never lack food, that game will come to their houses by itself, that the digging-sticks will till the soil, that arrows will hunt without their owners, that they will kill [93] many enemies and capture many of them to be eaten. He promises them long life, and promises the old women that they will become young again. He promises them such things and deceives them. They believe that there is something saintly and divine in the head which tells them these things in which they believe. When the medicine-man finishes, they start to tremble, especially the women, and their bodies begin to shake. They throw themselves upon the ground with foam in their mouths and the magician convinces them that the holiness enters them, and those who are not thus favored resent it. Then they offer him many things, and in the sicknesses (which afflict) the people, they also make

use, these magicians, of many tricks and pieces of magic. These are the (Moorish) adversaries with which we are here faced, and they sometimes make the sick people believe that we put in their bodies knives, scissors, and other things of that sort, and that with this we kill them.

17: Nobrega--93
116, 787, 726

(1550) 1844

Tupinamba

In their wars they take counsel, by way of divination with certain birds,

17: Nobrega--93 [2] (1550) 1844 Tupinamba
116, 266, 727

When they capture someone, [AW: in warfare] they take him to a great feast, with a rope tied about his neck, and give him, for a wife, the daughter of the chief, or whomsoever else he is most contented with, and begin to raise him as they would a pig, until the time for killing him arrives. For this occasion everyone from the surrounding district comes together, for a feast, and, one day before they kill him, they wash him all over, and the following day they carry him away, and put him in a public place, tied by a cord through the belt, and there comes one of them who is very well ornamented and (who) goes through the habits of his ancestors, and, finishing, he who is about to die answers him, saying that he is courageous and not afraid of death, and that he has also killed many of his own, and that he will be revenged by his family, and other things of a similar nature. And when he is dead they cut off his thumb, because it is with this that he looses his arrows, and the other (fingers) they fasten to sticks, in order to eat them when they are cooked and roasted.

17: Nobrega--93 [3] (1550) 1844 Tupinamba
116, 764

When someone dies, they place on the grave vessels full of food and a clean hammock. They believe that, after death, the dead still eat and rest over the grave. They place the bodies in round pits, and, if they are chiefs, they (cover this with) a palm shelter.

17: Nobrega--93 [4] (1550) 1844 Tupinamba
116, 775

They have no concept of glory, nor of hell, and they say simply that after death they go to a good place, (in which) in many ways the natural order of things is preserved.

17: Nobrega--94
116, 421

(1550) 1844

Tupinamba

They own nothing which is not common property, and that which one has he must (be ready) to part with to the others, principally this is the case with things to eat, of which nothing is saved for another day, nor cured in order to store up riches.

17: Nobrega--94 [2] (1550) 1844 Tupinamba
116, 583

To their daughters nothing is given in marriage, though the offspring remain obligated to serve their in-laws.

17: Nobrega--94 [3]
116, 574, 609

(1550) 1844

Tupinamba

Whatever Christian enters in their houses, they give him whatever they have to eat, and a clean hammock in which to sleep.

17: Nobrega--94 [4] (1550) 1844 Tupinamba
116, 837

The women are faithful to their husbands.

17: Nobrega--94 [5] (1550) 1844 Tupinamba
116, 773

They have a remembrance of the flood, however false (it may be), because they say that (when) the earth was covered with water, a woman and her husband climbed a pine-tree and, the waters having subsided, they came back down, and from them all men and women are descended.

17: Nobrega--94 [6] (1550) 1844 Tupinamba
116, 177

They have few words themselves (so that it difficult for us) to declare well our faith. But, with all this, they try to learn as best we are able to teach them, and sometimes we explain things in an oblique manner.

17: Nobrega--94 [7] (1550) 1844 Tupinamba
116, 177, 776

They are very attached to sensual things. Many times they asked me if God has a head and a body, and a mother; and as to whether He eats, and How He dresses, and other similar things.

They say that S. Thomé, whom they call Zomé, passed through that region and that in remembrance of his journey left his footprints; this was told to them by their ancestors. His footprints are shown near a river and I saw them. There are four footprints with toes. They say that when he left these footprints he was being pursued by the Indians, who wanted to shoot him with their arrows, and that, upon arriving at the river, the waters opened and he passed to the other side without getting wet. When they shot at him the arrows were thrown back, and the woods gave him passage. He promised to return sometime to see them again. He gazed upon them from Heaven, and became their intercessor with God, in order that they might know of Him, and receive the Sacred Faith as we hope. This is, in short, my dear brothers, what I have to tell you of this land: as I gain a greater knowledge of other things which occur here, I shall not forget to let you know of them.